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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Thirteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 235th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 18 January 1994, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. CORTI

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Initial report of Guyana (CEDAW/C/5/Add.63)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Chandaripal took a place at the Committee table.

2. Ms. CHANDARIPAL (Guyana) said that the global economic crisis of the 1980s had placed severe constraints on the capacity of developing countries to implement effective development and human rights policies. In the 1990s, countries had begun to take measures to overcome the crises of the 1980s, and economic restructuring had become the order of the day. However, such restructuring had had a negative impact on the most vulnerable sectors. At the global level, such sectors included the poorer developing countries and, at the national level, women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities. In the context of decreasing wages, increasing unemployment, infrastructural decay and shortages of basic commodities, women faced greater hardships than ever before, and, the genderization of poverty was becoming even more pronounced.

3. Over the past decade, Guyana had registered a negative population growth. The number of households headed by females was increasing, mainly because men were leaving the country in large numbers in search of jobs and higher incomes.

4. The years 1975-1987, the most difficult period for the Guyanese economy, had been marked by a heavy debt burden, budgetary and trade deficits and reduced supplies of consumer goods. That situation had been caused by a decline in the production of sugar, rice and bauxite, Guyana's major foreign-exchange earners. Economic policies pursued by the Government under the doctrine of "cooperative socialism" had led to a State-dominated public sector. Guyana's economic problems had led to the breakdown of basic infrastructures, which had resulted in the mass migration of the better educated sector of the workforce. A turning-point for the Guyanese economy had come in 1991 when, for the first time in many years, Guyana had experienced economic growth, which was attributable to the liberalization policies of its Economic Recovery Programme.

5. In 1990, the World Bank had rated Guyana as one of the poorest countries in the western hemisphere. The indicators of the widespread impoverishment of the Guyanese population included a decline in per capita production and real wages against a background of rising commodity prices, a sharp deterioration in the quality of the educational system, a decline in nutritional intake compounded by increased hunger and malnutrition, a growing number of homeless people and street children, a severe housing shortage, poor quality of public health care, a decline in life expectancy and increased infant mortality.

6. In 1988, in response to its economic problems, the Government of Guyana, with the assistance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Development Association (IDA), had begun its Economic Recovery Programme with a view to restoring economic growth by reducing local and foreign

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deficits. However, the Programme's austerity measures had only compounded the crisis created by economic mismanagement and deteriorating physical and social infrastructures. The most visible feature of the crisis had been a severe shortage of basic food supplies, which had caused additional hardship, especially for women. Since Guyana's economy had been largely State-owned, the restructuring, which provided for cuts in public spending, had had a negative effect on State employees and low-income groups.

7. The Government of Guyana had signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and had undertaken to remove obstacles to the advancement of women and, in particular, to implement the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies. The first step in that direction would be to develop a political platform that would ensure the equality of women in the economic and social fields.

8. The CHAIRPERSON opened the floor to experts who wished to ask questions.

9. Ms. ABAKA said that Guyana's problems could be solved if its Government adopted a principled political position. The persistence of certain religious practices and, in particular, financial problems, posed major obstacles to their solution. Guyana's common cultural heritage should be the force that united society and mobilized its participation in the solution of development problems.

10. The provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women should be incorporated into domestic legislation in order to ensure their observance by the local authorities. With respect to the Economic Recovery Programme, the Government of Guyana should take measures to alleviate the negative impact of economic restructuring on women and children. She wished to know what measures the Government had taken in that regard.

11. Ms. AYKOR said that Guyana was the only country in which all of the provisions of the Convention had been implemented. However, the report did not contain any statistical information on the results of the implementation of the Convention, which would have been very useful. In particular, more information should be provided on migration, rape, the school drop-out rate, family planning and, in particular, the number of abortions performed in the country.

12. Ms. DE RAMSEY said that, although the report contained a number of shortcomings, it appeared that, on the whole, the Government of Guyana was interested in the full integration of women into the country's development process. She wondered whether Guyanese women who had taken part in the struggle for independence, as well as those who had not, had been able to enjoy the fruits of social and economic development and other benefits provided by the current Government.

13. She quoted the provisions of the Constitution of Guyana that guaranteed the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual regardless of race, sex, colour or creed but which specified that the enjoyment of those guarantees were subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest. In her opinion, that provision could be a source of abuse and injustice.

14. Ms. ILIĆ inquired whether the Government of Guyana had requested the specialized agencies of the United Nations, or perhaps the private sector, to provide assistance in improving the status of women.

15. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said that the report contained a great deal of information on legislation in favour of indigenous women but gave little information about the true state of affairs. She wished to know whether women's non-governmental organizations had participated in the preparation of the report, and what role such organizations played in social mobilization.

16. Ms. NIKOLAEVA commended the report's sincerity and wealth of information and expressed her support for the principal aspects of the Government's policy described in the report. She wished to know in what way previous legislation had been amended to benefit women, and also whether the programmes mentioned in the report were subject to specific time-limits. In its next report, Guyana should make greater use of statistical data that gave an idea about the true state of affairs.

17. Ms. GARCÍA-PRINCE commended the report but noted that it was more descriptive than substantive. While the authors of the report expressed their views on various phenomena and practices, they said little about the changes that had taken place as a result of the Government's initiatives. Because the authors of the report relied too heavily on their personal interpretation of what was taking place in Guyana, the report contained a number of errors: in one place it stated that progress had been achieved in a certain field while, in another, that there had been no progress. The report should be more concrete.

18. Ms. TALLAWY said that, although the report candidly described existing problems, it provided scant information about measures that were being taken to solve them. That was true of maternal mortality, which was mentioned in the informal addendum to the report. She supported the view that, since the Government of Guyana lacked its own resources, it should request assistance from the international community. The fact that women and children suffered the most from restructuring programmes should be borne in mind not so much by Governments, which were well aware of the problem, as by international financial institutions. The Committee should convey its concerns about that situation to the Economic and Social Council.

19. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING agreed that women and children suffered the most from political changes and restructuring. Nevertheless, human rights must still be respected. In that regard, she was pleased to note that the Government of Guyana had made the former Women's Affairs Bureau into a ministry.

20. Ms. AOUIJ said that the Government of a country with a population of barely 800,000 could not afford to exclude women from the workforce. However, economic difficulties and the national question had taken precedence over women's concerns. Women's non-governmental organizations, which condemned the inequalities which had persisted since colonial times, had sponsored a bill on the equality of the sexes, which the Government had transmitted to the National Assembly; however, the bill had not yet been adopted. Such delays in the elimination of discriminatory practices were puzzling.

(Ms. Aouij)

21. While she appreciated Guyana's efforts to provide women with better education and health care, she considered those efforts to be insufficient. The new Government should demonstrate its desire for progressive change. She wished to know what positive measures the Government had taken in favour of women and how the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was reflected in national legislation.

Article 2

22. Ms. CARTWRIGHT, referring to general recommendation 19, of which she could find no mention in the report or in the informal addendum to it, inquired what measures were being taken to prevent rape, what assistance was provided to victims of rape and what action was taken against those guilty of rape.

23. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING, referring also to article 5, sincerely hoped that the representative of Guyana in her replies, or Guyana in its next report, would provide a concrete description of discriminatory customs and practices and indicate what impact they had on Guyana's three main ethnic groups, including in the area of religion.

24. Ms. GARCÍA-PRINCE requested additional information about the functioning of State bodies that dealt with the advancement of women, since neither the report nor the informal addendum to it provided sufficient information on the subject. She also requested information about the structure of those bodies and how they related to each other.

Article 3

25. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said that, while the report contained a great deal of general information on article 3, it did not provide specific details or figures. One positive aspect was the cooperation between the Women's Affairs Bureau and the Ministry of Labour, since there were many cases of discrimination in the field of labour and employment and much could be done to improve the status of women.

26. Ms. MÄKINEN wished to know the number of women who were actively engaged in politics and those who held political posts at the national and local levels.

Article 4

27. Ms. MÚÑOZ-GOMEZ inquired whether, in the current, economically adverse conditions, any special temporary measures were being taken to improve the status of women in the field of employment and to ensure their integration into public life, including their appointment to managerial posts.

Article 5

28. Ms. MÄKINEN wished to know how serious the problem of rape was in Guyana.

Article 6

29. Ms. OUEDRAOGO inquired about the extent of prostitution and its exploitation by third parties, the specific content of the programme of educational work with women engaged in prostitution, and the incidence of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) among such women and what measures were being taken to prevent the spread of that disease.

Article 7

30. Ms. GARCÍA-PRINCE said that she hoped that future reports would contain, in addition to information about the number of women in senior managerial posts, information on the number of women in middle management. She also requested information on the participation of women in political parties and trade unions and inquired whether those organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations, applied any standards to ensure the equality of women.

Article 8

31. Ms. ABAKA said that, as noted in the report, girls sometimes left school without finishing their elementary education, in order to prepare to become mothers and wives. That was very sad. However, the report also stated that that practice was no longer the norm and that more and more women were being integrated into the national development process. It was therefore necessary to specify what the true state of affairs was. The report also mentioned programmes designed to provide girls with technical and vocational education. In that regard, she wished to know whether there were programmes that enabled girls to receive a higher education.

32. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING requested additional information on the situation of the indigenous population of Guyana, in particular in such fields as education and health care.

Article 11

33. Ms. ABAKA said that she was concerned at references in the report that the appointment of senior managerial personnel in the non-productive sectors should be made with great care. In developing countries, the non-productive sectors usually included health care and education. Sharp budget cuts in the education and health-care sectors could have a negative effect on women's interests. The consequences of that policy therefore required further study.

34. Ms. MÚÑOZ-GOMEZ said that the report contained insufficient information on technical and vocational education for women. She inquired how the right of women to equal pay for equal work was put into practice.

35. Ms. GARCÍA-PRINCE said that the statistical information contained in the report, according to which only 15 per cent of women participated in agricultural production, was hardly realistic since, in Latin American statistical systems, persons engaged in agricultural production usually included only landowners. Thus, the information on the participation of women in the agricultural sector was considerably understated. Moreover, such information

(Ms. García-Prince)

did not reflect the fact that many women were employed in the informal sector. She therefore wished to have additional information on that subject.

36. Ms. MÄKINEN inquired whether women had the same opportunities as men to work a full working day.

Article 12

37. Ms. CARTWRIGHT asked what measures were being taken to prevent the spread of the AIDS pandemic, what educational programmes existed in that area and what preventive measures were being taken.

38. Ms. ABAKA asked what were the most common causes of women's illnesses in Guyana. She was pleased at the position of the minister on the question of the legalization of abortion in cases where abortion was medically recommended.

39. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING asked whether there were religious, political or other obstacles to the full legalization of abortion in Guyana. She also wished to know the causes of malnutrition among women. Was that phenomenon due to food shortages or a lack of money to buy food? If that was the case, that situation should be brought to the attention of the relevant international organizations and Governments of developed countries.

40. Ms. OUEDRAOGO requested additional information on two issues. As was well known, the right to life was a basic human right. In that regard, she was surprised at the absence of information on special services for women in the area of childbirth. Secondly, she wished to have information on the use of contraceptives in Guyana. She wished to know how that issue was dealt with in Guyana. What measures was Guyana taking to prevent the AIDS pandemic? That was particularly important to the Committee since women were more likely than men to become infected with that disease.

41. Ms. ILIĆ drew attention to the fact that the use of contraceptives was increasing in Guyana, with the exception of condoms and intra-uterine devices. Could that situation be explained by cultural factors, or was it related to the poverty of the population? If it was caused by poverty, every effort should be made to provide contraceptives to people who needed them. International organizations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), had a special role to play in that field.

42. Ms. KHAN commended the high calibre of the report. She was pleased that Guyana provided free health care, medical insurance and a pension system, which were available to women who were not employed in the formal sector. However, she was concerned about the decline in life expectancy in Guyana.

43. Ms. AOUIJ said that, as indicated in the report, the situation in the health-care sector in Guyana had seriously deteriorated for economic reasons. There was also concern about the lack of drinking water, a severe problem in almost all Caribbean States. Furthermore, the indicators of life expectancy and of maternal and child mortality had significantly worsened in connection with the insufficient use of modern means of contraception. What steps had been

(Ms. Aouij)

taken in that regard by the non-governmental organizations and the relevant government departments? Was there in Guyana a national system of family planning?

Article 14

44. Ms. ARAKA said that, as stated in the report, the Guyanese Government had begun a process of decentralization. However, the report lacked information on how that process was proceeding at the municipal and community level.

Article 16

45. Ms. FORDE noted that the Guyanese Government had signed the Convention without any reservations. It was also gratifying that Guyana had taken an active part in the work of the Committee. It was clear from the report that the Government of Guyana was making efforts to revise legislation on the family. Nevertheless, any such revision should be carried out in a comprehensive manner and not by means of piecemeal amendments to existing legislation.

46. Ms. CARTWRIGHT said that, in a divorce, the spouses had the right to divide property equally, without regard to their contribution to the acquisition of that property. She asked whether that right existed in Guyana.

47. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING inquired whether the Guyanese Government was carrying out any programmes to improve the situation of families in which children were living with only one parent. What difficulties were experienced by such families? Was their situation affected by racial or other factors?

48. Ms. AOUIJ said that, under the current judicial system, there still existed the possibility of sex discrimination. It was necessary to ensure that standard-setting documents and judicial practice fully conformed to the provisions of the Convention. She wished to have more detailed information on that question.

49. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the representative of Guyana and reminded her that the members of the Committee hoped to receive the replies to the questions raised at the afternoon meeting on 21 January.

50. Ms. Chandaripal (Guyana) withdrew.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

51. The CHAIRPERSON invited the Chairperson of the pre-session working group to introduce the report of 14 January 1994 prepared by its members (CEDAW/C/1994/CRP.2).

52. Ms. FORDE (Chairperson of the pre-session working group) said that in their consideration of the reports of States parties and other material submitted, the members of the working group had based their approach on established practice. Their observations and questions had been addressed to the seven States listed in the working group's agenda. In their work, the group had encountered a

(Ms. Forde)

number of problems. First, because of the absence of one member, the remaining members had had to work more intensively. Secondly, the Division for the Advancement of Women was in a transitional stage, and the members of the working group had felt the direct effects of the transfer of the Division from Vienna to New York. Thirdly, there were particularly acute problems relating to obtaining the necessary documents, including the other language versions. Bearing those problems in mind, the members of the group had considered such questions as the timeliness of the submission of reports and supplementary reports, the length of certain reports and the means of improving the way in which they were submitted, received, translated into the various languages and transmitted for consideration by the experts. In that connection it had been proposed that provision should be made for the possibility of the working group holding meetings at periods other than immediately before the Committee's sessions, and also of lengthening the period of its work. That issue deserved serious consideration by the Committee, so that the problem could be solved before the working group began its work for the fourteenth session. In conclusion, she expressed her appreciation to all those who had contributed to the work of the pre-session working group, including the technical staff, the interpreters, the staff member who had serviced the meetings, the Secretariat, and also the other three members of the working group who, despite a number of difficulties, had contributed to that work. She proposed, that taking account of the comments of the members of the working group or the experts, the report should be adopted.

53. Ms. BUSTELO welcomed the work of the group and noted that the issues prepared by its members had been very useful to the members of the Committee.

54. Ms. KHAN said she regretted that, owing to illness, she had been unable to participate in the work of the pre-session working group, and expressed her profound appreciation to the members of the group who, in her absence, had had to cope with an increased workload.

55. The CHAIRPERSON said she would take it that the Committee wished to adopt the report of the pre-session working group (CEDAW/C/1994/CRP.2).

56. The report was adopted.

57. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING requested the Deputy Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women to explain certain questions relating to the methods of work of the pre-session working group.

58. Mr. MATHIASON (Deputy Director, Division for the Advancement of Women) said that the Division was in a transitional stage, and certain problems encountered by the pre-session working group, such as the absence of documents in all the relevant languages, had been largely due to the transfer of the Division from Vienna to New York. However, as the Chairperson of the working group had said, that had not been the sole factor. The Committee and its pre-session working group - as well as all human rights treaty bodies and, of course, all bodies using conference services - faced the fact that it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain those services, including preparation of the documents in

(Mr. Mathiason)

the six official languages. The Secretariat was attending to that problem, which also involved the length of documents. As could be noted, the reports by the Secretariat were not lengthy. That not only facilitated their study but also enabled them to be reproduced more quickly. As to the documents submitted to the Committee, they were very lengthy, and the Committee, as well as the other treaty bodies, must, in the final analysis, themselves resolve that problem, which was nevertheless being actively considered by the General Assembly and the Committee on Conferences. However, the most serious problem encountered by the pre-session working group was connected with the submission of supplementary material. It would be recalled that, the previous year, the Committee had decided not to process supplementary material submitted after 1 September. Despite that, however, much additional material had been received two weeks late, and that raised the question of whether the deadlines should be strictly observed, bearing in mind that, in the absence of the supplementary information, it would not be possible to carry on the qualitative and constructive dialogue which the Committee desired. Thus, rather than a question of deadlines for the submission of documentation, it was more a question of what information the Committee wished to receive and needed. Furthermore, the interval between the submission of a document and its consideration was on average three years; and in many countries during that time there was a change of government. It was difficult to say whether there was a simple answer to that problem. However, it should be noted that, in the current year, the questions submitted by the experts had been received in good time, enabling them to be translated into the other languages in time to be utilized by the pre-session working group in its work. The Secretariat intended, in both the current and the following year, to provide the pre-session working group in a timely fashion with the full documentation it needed. Taking into account, however, the difficulties connected with the provision of conference services throughout the United Nations system, the possibility of the timely distribution of supplementary information would continue to be problematic.

59. The CHAIRPERSON said she wished to recall her suggestion that, after the consideration of each initial report, one expert should be designated to prepare written observations drawn up on the basis of the questions put by the members of the Committee. That practice was followed in all other human rights treaty bodies. Since the suggestion had not given rise to any comments, she felt that the members agreed with it. She therefore suggested that, for the purpose of preparing written comments on the report of the Netherlands, the Committee should designate Ms. Schöpp-Schilling, and for the report on Guyana, Ms. Forde.

60. Ms. FORDE said that she could neither accept nor decline that suggestion, in so far as she had no conception of the duties it involved.

61. The CHAIRPERSON said that the written comments would take the form of a summary based on the report, in other words, they would include the general observations, the positive or negative appraisal of the various facts relating to the situation and the specific proposals addressed to the Government. Such a summary would be no longer than three to five pages.

62. Ms. FORDE inquired whether the written comments would constitute an addendum to the comments and views already reflected in the oral summary given by the Chairperson. Furthermore, she wondered whether the expert undertaking that task would have to do it during the session, and wished to know how to resolve the problem of subjectivity on the part of that expert. She felt that those comments and views of experts that were contained in the oral summary were sufficient, and that the Committee should follow the usual procedure whereby, after the replies to the questions put by the experts had been given, the Chairperson made her own comments on them.

63. The CHAIRPERSON said that the concluding comments made by the Chairperson were not included in the summaries of the reports. According to the practice followed by other human rights treaty bodies, one expert prepared a report which was then considered by their members during a short period of time.

64. Ms. ILIĆ said that the summary of questions put by the experts should have been included in the report of the Committee, as had been the practice earlier. Furthermore, the Committee should not blindly follow the example of other committees, but rather should adopt only those decisions and recommendations which were necessary. If the Committee took a decision to prepare a separate recommendation for each country, she would support that decision, but first she would want to acquaint herself with those recommendations. In addition, the responsibility of such a task should not be placed on one person: it should be distributed among several members of the Committee.

65. Ms. GARCÍA-PRINCE said that she supported the Chairperson's suggestion to the effect that, after it had received the report from a State party, the Committee should put to that State a specific recommendation concerning the policy on women which it should follow.

66. Turning to questions of procedure, she noted that, in the event that a report was assigned to one person, it could be considered only if all the experts agreed with its contents; that would complicate the work of the Committee. As a way out, she suggested that, following the session of the Committee, those parts of the report containing the comments of the experts should be sent to the countries. In that connection, the Rapporteur must ensure that her report contained not only the questions raised but also the recommendations.

67. Ms. CARTWRIGHT supported the Chairperson's suggestion concerning the preparation of a summary for each State party that had submitted its reports to the Committee. She considered that each expert could prepare a summary during the session on one national report. She did not agree that such a summary would be too subjective, inasmuch as the basis for each of them would be the questions posed by all the experts. She felt that the Chairperson had many other duties to perform and should not be given the additional burden of analysing the national reports, and she therefore supported the proposals put forward earlier.

68. Ms. BUSTELO fully endorsed the views of Ms. Cartwright and added that the Committee's workload was constantly growing and that, in order for the Committee to justify the hopes placed upon it, that work must be distributed among all its members. That question should be considered very carefully by working group I.

69. Ms. AOUIJ said she agreed with the Chairperson's suggestions and felt that the summaries would not represent a statement of the views of any particular expert: they would reflect the most fundamental points commented on by the experts during the meetings. The fourth part of the summary would contain the proposals and recommendations addressed to the Governments, thereby helping them in the preparation of future reports.

70. Ms. ABAKA said that, in her view, the preparation of a report by one expert would not signify that that expert was including in it her personal views, since in preparing it, she would take into account the report prepared by the Rapporteur, and it would encompass the views of all the experts. She therefore fully supported the idea mentioned earlier and was concerned only about the deadlines for submission of those reports, since it seemed unlikely that they could be prepared during the session.

71. Ms. DE RAMSEY said that the persons responsible for analysing the reports of States parties should be designated prior to the submission of the reports themselves. She proposed that the task of preparing each of the reports should be assigned not to one person but to a small group of two, and thus, during the session, 20 experts could consider 10 reports.

72. Ms. NIKOLAEVA endorsed the idea expressed by the Chairperson, but noted that it was necessary to think more clearly about the organization of work, in order to avoid duplication of effort of the working group during the inter-sessional period and of the Committee itself in plenary meetings. The work of preparing the summaries should be assigned not to specific persons but to groups, so that it would reflect the various approaches and would achieve a consensus.

73. Ms. OUEDRAOGO firmly supported the idea of having experts prepare the summaries, which would be of practical value. In her opinion, their preparation should be assigned to small groups, which would partly solve the problem of subjectivity in their views.

74. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING said that, although she, too, agreed with the views expressed by Ms. Ilić, there were nevertheless constructive elements in the work of other committees which could be adopted. It made sense to inform Governments of the views expressed by the experts concerning the policies which the Governments were pursuing and also concerning the format of the reports submitted; since, however, the preparation of such a conclusion would require considerable time, it would be useful to send Governments a short, interim summary of such comments. She would be interested to know whether the Governments could give such summaries broad publicity within their countries, especially among women's organizations. Such a procedure would enhance the practical results of the Committee's work.

75. Turning to the Committee's current practice, she noted that, since the consideration of the reports of States parties had already begun, the experts responsible for preparing the summaries would have to rely on the summary records of the meetings, but since their preparation and translation into the other languages required some time, it did not seem possible at the present time to carry out such work.

(Ms. Schöpp-Schilling)

76. She supported the idea of designating a minimum of two persons to be responsible for each summary, and requested the Secretariat to clarify what possibilities there were of publicizing in one form or another the views expressed by the experts.

77. Ms. TALLAWY supported the value of the summaries, which contained a condensed compilation of the various views expressed by the experts, but raised the question of the format of such a summary. In her view, it should be short and should reflect the views of not one or two experts, but all of them, based on the questions they had posed. It should reflect not only the positive aspects of the report of the State party, but also its shortcomings, such as the absence of - or insufficient - information on a specific question. Those comments would greatly assist the Government in preparing its next report.

78. She agreed that the preparation of the summary should be carried out not by the Chairperson but by one or two experts, and noted that the experts' comments should be considered by the Committee immediately after the national report had been introduced, so that the Committee could elaborate on them. The experts who prepared the summaries could, in the course of preparing them, consult the members of the inter-sessional working groups in order to achieve a clearer formulation of their recommendations.

79. Ms. FORDE said she opposed that proposal, since the time spent in discussing and translating the relevant documents could be more usefully spent in considering many of the reports of States parties awaiting consideration. What took place at the meetings of the Committee was already reflected in the summary records. At the same time, she was ready to comply with any decision adopted by the Committee.

80. Ms. QUINTOS-DELES reminded the Committee that both the recommendation that one member should prepare a preliminary statement on the report and the recommendation that a summary concerning that report should be drawn up were interrelated. It was obvious that both of them would be carried out by the same person. If the corresponding decision was taken, it would presumably take effect only from the next session. However, she had the necessary notes which could give a picture of what had taken place also at the current session, so that a decision could perhaps already be put into effect. As far as the summary records were concerned, they only mechanically reflected the proceedings, whereas the summary based on the report could reflect the views and comments of the members of the Committee in greater depth and could also reflect the recommendations addressed to the Government in a clearer and more concrete form.

81. Ms. KHAN said it was simply essential that the Committee should inform States of what it thought about their reports. That also enhanced the Committee in the eyes of public opinion in the States concerned. Obviously there were various ways of ensuring that. Since detailed summaries of the meetings were already being prepared, perhaps one member of the Committee should be assigned the task of condensing them, and then of sending the relevant material to the Government.

82. Ms. ABAKA considered that, prior to the preparation of the summary on the report, it was necessary to await the issuance of the summary records of the relevant meetings.

83. The CHAIRPERSON said that the discussion that had started was very natural, but it was introducing something new into the Committee's work. She personally supported the suggestion that it was time for the Committee to get in step with the other human rights treaty bodies. The summaries prepared by the Committee concerning the reports could sharpen Governments' awareness of what was expected of them. Government officials hardly had the time to read all the materials of the Committee and to acquaint themselves with every question raised at its meetings. At the present time, she had the task of preparing a summary to supplement the consideration of each report. However, that summary was oral, whereas a written summary would carry much more weight.

84. The proposal amounted to designating from one to three experts for each report, who would carefully follow the progress of the discussion of each report and would note down all the comments and recommendations. Obviously, there would not be a consensus on that question. However, since it was an important issue, she intended to put it to the vote at the next meeting. Whether the decision was positive or negative, it had to be taken.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.